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# F O C I

Forms Of Contemporary Illinois

ILLINOIS DOCUMENTS

MAR 19 1991

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Michael Tropea

*Untitled*, 1990. Cloth, steel, plaster, acrylic, 60" x 30" x 60".

The Illinois State Museum

Presents

# JIN SOO KIM

# FOCI: Jin Soo Kim

## Introduction

The Illinois State Museum proudly presents the artwork of Jin Soo Kim in the first installment of the three-part solo series titled FOCI (Forms of Contemporary Illinois). FOCI, now in its second season, has been designed as a forum for artwork which is absolutely current. Each solo exhibition will focus on a contemporary Illinois artist with a particular and significant approach to art making. This program is funded in part by the Illinois Arts Council, a State agency; and contributions from the R.W. Bradley Supply Co.



Since 1983, Jin Soo Kim has been known for environmental installations. She has transformed profusions of urban debris into entanglements that mimic nature. Entering a Kim installation, the viewer experienced a haunting and poetic jungle which enveloped the exhibition space in a web of interconnected forms. She has made a personal ritual of collecting cast-off matter, seeing within each scrap a cycle. This FOCI series exhibition may seem radically different from the densely packed environments of Kim's earlier work, but upon closer review what emerges is a sure-footed continuation of her process. This leads to a new "representation" of her materials.

As of this writing Kim has made preliminary decisions regarding the FOCI installation. "In an installation the space is the most crucial factor." Like the painter sizing the canvas preparing to paint or the sculptor examining a block of stone or wood, Kim visits the site, experiences it, and digests this impression upon returning to her studio. In this exhibit she incorporates the pillars into the substance of the installation and its final resolution.



*Environment L*, 1989.

Mixed media, copper.

Installation view

Chicago Public Library

Cultural Center.







Brian Etheredge



(detail), 1990.  
Steel mesh and  
copper.

For Kim new insights and “next steps” are always the outgrowth of previous experience. Installations produced in 1988 at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Museum of Fine Art in Houston, played a pivotal role in the materials we see in this exhibition. Upon completion of these installations, which completely transformed the gallery spaces with found materials—hoses, cloth, fencing, rope, bedsprings, bike and auto parts, floor and ceiling tiles, wrapped elements, etc.—she felt she had reached a sort of culmination, and that in order to move on other contradictory elements were needed. Usually, Kim would return immediately to gathering discarded materials and begin the transformation of wrapping back in her studio. But after the 1988 installations she could not go on as before. Instead she explored working with copper wire and conduit—materials she had already been using in individual sculptures. This copper was “found” in her newly occupied studio which was formerly a grocery store.

In May 1989, she further explored these new copper materials in an installation at the Evanston Art Center. After this she remained in the studio wrapping large steel mesh grids with copper wires for long periods of time. She recalls, “All I wanted to do was wrap copper. For months I worked like a machine wrapping the copper panels. It was a simple, soothing, yet lengthy and primitive experience.” These were incorporated into her next installation, *Environment L* (see photo), in combination with materials from earlier installations.

This will be the first installation where the overarching structure created with a plethora of materials will be left at home in the studio. Primary geometries, right angles, and arcs predominate as if suddenly the jungle has been tamed. In a recent studio visit Kim explained, “I think it is like the way Giacometti worked in his earlier painting—then look at his later painting.” Kim explains it as “arriving at the simple through the complex.” In her earlier environments, this weblike structure served as a unifying element, a skeleton. But here each part has its structure and presence like fragments or areas in relationship, a dialogue. The connections are implied rather than physical.

Part of the beauty and power of her work is found through examining the crafting of it. In the bulging and twisting of the wrapping itself there is a microcosmic world of contradictory forces. Copper strands wind and change direction; opposition and tension of the white, stretched, bandagelike material create positive and negative interplays of light; baffles interrupt the simplicity of the arched gridlike structure. All surfaces are considered. Her Eastern roots are apparent in her attitude toward her work, the idea of studio assistants furrows her brow, "I might miss something if I would break the continuity with the work."

Although she has chosen to edit the variety and volume of her materials she still continues to re-present and infuse found and scrap material with new purpose. There is an attitude approaching nurturance apparent in her respect for impoverished materials. All of the writhing power of the forms of her earlier installations are here stated in the copper braids inside the milk crates or in the gestural movement of wire as it contrasts the geometry of a grid. The white screen and baskets and wrapped copper panels whether alone or interrelated are affirmative statements on the life cycle.

The tone of this new work is clearly more regenerative, not the reminder of our Faustian pact with nature that her earlier installations could be. Simple white cloth or copper subtly transform the original context of "found object" or common steel mesh. The subtext of individual acts of reclamation and transformation are here compressed to the grids and simplified supports. We see metaphors of coexistence and the possibility of dialogue in an open-ended work that continues the artist's conversation with her materials, her process, her art, and her life. A conversation in which we are invited to share.

Robert Sill  
Assistant Curator for Art  
Illinois State Museum



*Untitled*, 1990.

Steel and copper.



Brian Etheredge



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## Selected Biographical Information

Born in 1950 in Seoul, Korea, came to the USA in 1974. The artist lives and works in Evanston, Illinois.

## Education

- 1983 M.F.A. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- 1976-77 Graduate Studies in Art, Western Illinois University, Macomb, Il.
- 1969-73 B.S. Seoul National University, Korea

## Selected Exhibitions

- 1991 *FOCI: Jin Soo Kim*, Illinois State Museum, Springfield, IL  
*Jin Soo Kim*, Gallery Hyundai, Seoul, Korea  
*Jin Soo Kim*, Columbia College, Chicago, IL  
*Jin Soo Kim*, Madison Art Center, Madison, WI
- 1990 *Something Strange*, White Columns, New York, N.Y.
- 1989 *Sculpture*, Betsy Rosenfield Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Transformed Object*, Evanston Art Center, Evanston, IL  
*Present at the Creation*, Chicago Public Library Cultural Center, Chicago, IL
- 1988 *Sculpture Inside/Outside*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, traveled to: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
- 1986 *Awards in the Visual Arts 5*, Norton Gallery of Art, West Palm Beach, FL, also traveled to: Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH  
Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY  
*A New Generation from the S.A.I.C.*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL  
*Showing Off*, State of Illinois Art Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1985 *Options 24*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL  
*Inaugural Exhibit*, State of Illinois Art Gallery, Chicago, IL.

## Art Awards

- 1988 Illinois Arts Council Individual Artists Fellowship
- 1987 Illinois Arts Council Individual Artists Fellowship
- 1986 Illinois Arts Council Individual Artists Fellowship
- 1985 Awards in the Visual Arts 5  
Illinois Arts Council Individual Artists Fellowship  
Sculpture Chicago, '85

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Jin Soo Kim for her time, conversation, and artwork for which we are the richer. I would like to express my gratitude to my Illinois State Museum colleagues whose collective efforts have realized this show: Director for Art Kent Smith whose support has been instrumental, Associate Curator Terry Suhre for his encouragement, Preparator Brian Etheredge for his photographic work, Registrar Carole Peterson, Assistant Preparator Phil Kennedy, and Administrative Assistant Amy Knox.

⊕ *Untitled*, 1990.  
Steel and copper.



Brian Etheredge

# MUSEUM

**FOCI: Jin Soo Kim**

Curated by Robert Sill

Illinois State Museum, Springfield

Reception: Sunday, January 19, 1991

6:00–8:00 p.m.

**January 19–March 24, 1991**

Illinois State Museum, Springfield

In the Arts and Sciences Gallery

**Illinois State Museum**

Spring and Edwards

Springfield, IL 62706

217/782-7386

**Museum Hours:**

Monday–Saturday, 8:30 a.m. –5:00 p.m.

Sunday, 12:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.

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